

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 1, 2004

Dear Chairman Stevens and Senator Inouye:

There are still 40,000 women who die each year of breast cancer. We don't know how to prevent the disease. We don't know how to detect it truly early. And we don't know how to cure it for any individual woman. This year alone, more than 258,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. This is a serious health issue that must be addressed. That is not to say it is the only issue, but it is one that must be a national priority. We may have increased awareness about breast cancer, but we still don't have the answers. While we don't have the answers to breast cancer, we do have the power to find the answers.

You and your Committee have shown great determination and leadership in searching for the answers by funding the Department of Defense (DOD) Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program (BCRP) at a level that has brought us closer to eradicating this disease. The DOD BCRP's twelve years of progress in the fight against breast cancer has been made possible by this Committee's investment in breast cancer research.

To continue this unprecedented progress, we ask that you support a \$150 million appropriation for fiscal year (FY) 2005. The program was cut back from \$175 million to \$150 million three years ago as part of an across-the-board cut in Congressionally directed health programs. There continues to be excellent science that goes unfunded which is why **we believe that the BCRP should be appropriated \$150 million for FY 2005.**

In the span of only twelve years, the DOD Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program has established itself as model medical research program, respected throughout the cancer community for its innovative and accountable approach. The groundbreaking research performed through the program has the potential to benefit not just breast cancer, but all cancers, as well as other diseases. Biomedical research is being transformed by the BCRP's success.

Since the program's inception, there have been incredible discoveries at a very rapid rate that offer fascinating insights into the biology of breast cancer. The program funded a vital component of the revolutionary work that led to the development of the innovative drug Herceptin, the first monoclonal antibody in the war against cancer. From new methods of extracting breast cancer cells at their earliest stages to unprecedented research into gene/environment interaction to quality of life issues, this program leads the way in innovative approaches to breast cancer prevention, treatment and early detection. These discoveries have brought into sharp focus the areas of research that hold promise and will build on the knowledge and investment we have made.

The DOD BCRP is as efficient as it is innovative. In fact, 90% of funds go directly to research grants. The flexibility of the program allows the Army to administer it in such a way as to maximize its limited resources. The program is able to quickly respond to current scientific advances, and is able to fill gaps by focusing on research that is traditionally under-funded. It is also responsive, not just to the scientific community, but also to the public. This is evidenced by the inclusion of consumer advocates at both the peer and programmatic review levels. The consumer perspective

helps the scientists understand how the research will affect the community, and allows for funding decisions based on the concerns and needs of patients and the medical community.

The DOD Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program not only provides a funding mechanism for high-risk, high-return research, but also reports the results of this research to the American people at a public meeting called the "Era of Hope." The 1997 meeting was the first time a federally funded program reported back to the public in detail not only on the funds used, but also on the research undertaken, the knowledge gained from that research and future directions to be pursued. The transparency of the BCRP allows scientists, consumers and the American public to see the exceptional progress made in breast cancer research.

At the 2002 Era of Hope meeting all BCRP award recipients from fiscal years 1998-2000 were invited to report their research findings and many awardees from previous years were asked to present advancements in their research. Scientists reported important advances in the study of cancer development at the molecular and cellular level. Researchers presented the results of research that elucidates several genes and proteins responsible for the spread of breast cancer to other parts of the body, and, more importantly, reveals possible ways to stop this growth. The meeting, which marked the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the program, also featured grant recipients who are working towards more effective and less toxic treatments for breast cancer that "target" the unique characteristics of cancer cells and have a limited effect on normal cells.

The Institute of Medicine, in an analysis of the program, overwhelmingly supports the BCRP's continuation, stating "the program fills a unique niche among public and private funding sources for cancer research. It is not duplicative of other programs and is a promising vehicle for forging new ideas and scientific breakthroughs in the nation's fight against breast cancer."

There continue to be millions of American women living with breast cancer, as well as their friends and families, who hope that a means of preventing, curing, and better treating this disease will soon be found. To help further the search for answers, we ask that you fund the DOD Peer-Reviewed Breast Cancer Research Program at **\$150 million for FY 05.**

Sincerely,

Stephen S. Murray  
Tom Harkin  
Adrian Fetter

Mike DeWine

Patrick Leahy  
Susan Collins  
P. J. Chafee  
Robert A. Neuberger

John E. Sumner  
Hazel Allen  
Patty Murray  
Muriel Carbone  
Bill Nelson  
Jeff Buz  
Eun Buz  
Lyn Anderson  
Mildred McNeill

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Mary J. Johnson  
J. Wilson  
Jack Reed  
E. Benjamin Johnson  
Harry Reid  
Elizabeth Pote

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Paul S. Sauer

Charles Schure

Jeri Bunning

Nora Colman

Frank R. Santenberg

Hub Kohl

John Warrin

Lamar Alexander

Barbara Boyer

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Lyman Christen

John Breau

Russell B. Feingold

Tom Vasche

Norm Wyden

Samuel H. Decker

Chuck Handley

Rick Legar

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John Enj

Joseph Gross

Ed Kennedy

Chuck Hassen

Don Talbot  
Brian Hatch

John Edwards

Dick Durbin

Pat G. Fitzgerald

Blanche L. Lincoln

John Samuel

Carl Levin

Tom F. Kelly

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